

Water Workout

*Fun and fitness
with kayaking*

by Capt. Christine L. Kunz

photo by Navy Photographer's Mate Airman
Konstandinos Goumenidis

The Air Force wants you to get fit and stay fit. And you should. However, when peddling miles on the stationary bike or running on the treadmill at the base gym with only the TV staring back starts getting old, why not try something different and join the 8 million people who already kayak the open waters.

According to Canoe and Kayak magazine, kayaking offers the op-

portunity to meet new and interesting people, travel and explore otherwise inaccessible waterways. It's also a popular activity for families with children looking for opportunities to enjoy recreation and exercise together.

"Everyone can paddle," said Gordon Black, director of safety education and instruction with the American Canoe Association. "We refer to it as a 'lifetime' sport because it can be done even into advanced age.

There is some aspect of kayaking for everyone."

The word kayak literally means "hunter's boat." Its original purpose was to help natives hunt animals on inland lakes, rivers and the sea because certain areas of the land were not fertile enough to support their populations. But soon kayaking broadened from a person's lifeline to a sport and became a part of the Olympics in 1936, with the introduc-

tion of four events: the single and pairs 1,000 meter and 10,000 meter races. Later, the white-water race and slalom events were added.

Many military people have found kayaking to be the perfect form of outdoor recreation. And with many base outdoor recreation centers offering information and equipment rentals, kayaking is quickly becoming a hobby instead of a sport.

"Kayaking is not only a lot of fun,

but it's a great workout," admitted 2nd Lt. Brandon Farley, a security forces officer at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. "I can get away with friends and have fun, all while working out, too."

Kayaking can be done at nearly any level of intensity. For a short paddle, you can jump in for a quick hour of exercise on a nearby lake, river or quiet ocean bay. This can be a relaxing cruise, or wind sprints designed to improve strength and cardiovascular fitness.

Twenty-eight-year-old 1st Lt. Michael-David Komorous knows first-hand the fitness benefit kayaking provides. He's been kayaking on the rivers of California, Oregon, Minnesota, West Virginia and Colorado for six years.

"I love how you can get a great cardio workout and enjoy the outdoors at the same time," said the combat crew instructor from F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyo. "Kayaking really develops your lateral muscles, forearms and lower back."

Many people think of kayaking as a summer activity, but with the right kayak, gear and training, you can paddle year-round. Contact your services squadron outdoor recreation center to see if kayak rentals are offered in your area. Broadening your exercise horizons to the water can be more enjoyable than staring at those gym walls.

For more information on kayaking, go to www.acanet.org or www.canoeekayak.com. ☺



Did you know?

"For a 170-pound person, a half-hour of kayaking will likely burn around 204 calories."

— Capt. Cliff Moore,
health promotion manager for the Health and Wellness Center,
Lackland Air Force Base, Texas

Equipment start-up

For some sports enthusiasts, gear must make a fashion statement. For the kayaker, equipment serves more important purposes — protection from the elements and assistance in emergencies. According to Gordon Black, an avid kayaker since 1972 and director of safety education and instruction with the American Canoe Association, the basic gear required is a life jacket, kayak and paddle. A full list of equipment varies based on models, skill levels and costs.

■ **Life jacket:** Only type III Coast

Guard approved life jackets should be used for white-water and flat-water paddling to provide buoyancy and extra insulation. They are available in vest or pullover styles, but should be designed for paddlers with large neck and arm holes and narrow shoulder straps to allow for good freedom of movement through all paddling motions. They should have adjustable straps at the waist, shoulder and arm holes to provide a snug fit. Although there's a breaking-in period to a life jacket, the right one should feel good the first time.

The cost of a life jacket can start at \$25 and can go up to \$175. The main difference

in price is the amount of accessories and flashy style.

■ **Kayak:** Get a kayak that's well-suited for the type of kayaking you'll be doing. There are three basic types:

Recreational — Often the first choice for beginners, recreational, or "rec," boats are normally 10 to 15 feet long and 24 to 30 inches wide with flat bottoms. They often have large cockpits, but sit-on-top models have no cockpit.

Touring — As kayaks get longer (14 to 20 feet) and narrower (20 to 25 inches), they can move faster. Sea kayaks are on the longer, narrower end of the spectrum, with

many features that allow for safe travel in open water, including bulkheads for flotation and cockpits that accommodate spray skirts to keep water out.

White-water — Today's most common white-water kayaks are 6 to 9 feet long, 23 to 26 inches wide, and have flat bottoms and flat sides.

After deciding what type of kayak to purchase, price will be a big factor in determining which model to buy. An entry-level plastic kayak can be as low as \$250. Other plastic models can run as high as \$1,500. Fiberglass boats will cost from about \$1,000 to \$3,000. Inflatable boats can start at

about \$250 and go to \$2,000. Folding boats will set you back \$1,300 for an entry-level kayak and up to \$4,500 for a top-notch double kayak.

■ **Paddle:** It's the paddle that connects muscle motor to the water. Kayak paddles are usually measured in centimeters, with touring ones longer than those for white-water. Boat width affects ideal paddle size, too. The bigger the blade, the more work you'll do with each stroke. Larger blades are better suited to a slower cadence. Plastic and aluminum paddles are durable and low maintenance. Wood can vary greatly in weight, strength and symmetry, and requires

upkeep. Fiberglass and carbon fiber make for stiff, super lightweight, high-performance paddles.

The range in price of a paddle is based on type of paddle — single or double — and material. Aluminum and plastic paddles are usually the least expensive but are considerably heavier. Fiberglass and carbon fiber materials lighten the load but increase the cost. Wood falls in the middle, lighter than some, heavier than others. Cost is usually in the middle as well. A basic double kayak paddle can start at \$40 and range to \$350.

— Capt. Christine L. Kunz